Genre

Stephen Neale

Notes

[1] Tom Ryall, 'Teaching Through Genre' in *Screen Education* no 17, p. 28.
[2] J. Kitses, *Horizons West*, London 1969, p. 24.
[3] C. McArthur, *Underworld USA*, London 1972, p. 20.
[4] E. Buscombe, 'The Idea of Genre in the American Cinema' in *Screen*, Vol 11, no 2, p. 43.
[5] C. McArthur, op. cit., p. 13.
[6] T. Ryall, op. cit., p. 28.
[7] C. McArthur, op. cit., p. 24.
[8] E. Buscombe, op. cit., p. 36.
[9] C. McArthur, *Iconography and Iconology*, British Film Institute Educational Advisory Service/Society for Education in Film and Television, seminar paper, 1973.
[10] T. Ryall, op. cit., p. 27.
[11] T. Ryall, op. cit., p. 28.
[12] E. Buscombe, op. cit., pp. 39–40.
[13] C. McArthur, *Underworld USA*, p. 18.
[14] T. Ryall, op. cit., p. 30.

Chapter 2

The cinema is not simply an industry or a set of individual texts. Above all, it is a social institution. As Christian Metz writes in *The Imaginary Signifier*:

> 'The cinematic institution is not just the cinema industry (which works to fill cinemas, not to empty them), it is also the mental machinery—another industry—which spectators "accustomed to the cinema" have internalised historically and which has adapted them to the consumption of films'.[1]

Not only a set of economic practices or meaningful products, cinema is also a constantly fluctuating series of signifying processes, a 'machine' for the production of meanings and positions, or rather positionings for meaning; a machine for the regulation of the orders of subjectivity. Genres are components in this 'machine'. As systematised forms of the articulation of meaning and position, they are a fundamental part of the cinema's 'mental machinery'. Approached in this way, genres are not to be seen as forms of textual codifications, but as systems of orientations, expectations and conventions that circulate between industry, text and subject.

In this context, a number of points should be stressed. Firstly, cinema involves a plurality of operations and processes. The term 'machine' refers less to a single englobing operation across the whole field of cinema or across the whole of the social formation in which it finds its historically varying place, than to the plurality of channels, demarcated spaces and orders of regularity that underpin signifying practices. It refers to the way in which each of these practices is constantly classified, separated and differentiated in order to produce a coherence, a mode of regulation within them. It refers to the way in which these practices are constantly bound into ordered spaces and modalities of production and consumption, producing a variety of articulations of subjectivity distributed across and constitutive of a variety of audiences.

Secondly, it is by no means the case that each of the practices involved in this plurality has an equal social weight: the practices that constitute mainstream commercial cinema are massively dominant and therefore have a social presence and a social impact far in excess of any others. Indeed, not only do they provide the baseline in relation to which the others find their definition (as 'avant-garde', as 'political', as 'art', or whatever), but in doing so, they provide the terms and the examples in relation to which cinema itself—its forms and meanings, possibilities and pleasures—is both defined and understood.

Thirdly, regulation does not simply hinge upon mechanisms of repetition. Regulation is a *process*. Hence difference is a fundamental and a fundamentally active principle within each of the spheres of practice constitutive of cinema as a whole, including mainstream cinema. The very existence of distinct genres illustrates this point. Equally, however, difference is itself constantly regulated, and, as far as mainstream cinema is concerned, genres might be said to be the major instances of and instruments for such regulation.

The focus of the cinematic institution, of its industrial, commercial and

ideological practices, of the discourses that it circulates, is narrative. What main-stream cinema produces as its commodity is narrative cinema, cinema as nar-rative. Hence, at a general social level, the system of narration adopted by mainstream cinema serves as the very currency of cinema itself, defining the horizon of its aesthetic and ideological possibilities, providing the measure of cinematic 'literacy' and intelligibility. Hence, too, narrative is the primary instance and instrument of the regulatory processes that mark and define the ideological function of the cinematic institution as a whole.

Genre and Narrative

Narrative is always a process of transformation of the balance of elements that constitute its pretext: the interruption of an initial equilibrium and the tracing of the dispersal and refiguration of its components. The system of narration characteristic of mainstream cinema is one which orders that dispersal and refiguration in a particular way, so that dispersal, disequilibrium is both main-tained and contained in figures of symmetry, of balance, its elements finally re-placed in a new equilibrium whose achievement is the condition of narrative closure.

Two points are important here. The first is that the 'elements' in question, their equilibrium and disequilibrium, their order/disorder, are not simply re-ducible to the signified components of a given narrative situation, nor are they solely the product of the narrative considered as a single discourse or discursive structure. Rather, they are signifiers articulated in a narrative process which is simultaneously that of the inscription of a number of discourses, and that of the modification, restructuration and transformation they each undergo as a result of their interaction. The second point, following on from this, is that equilibrium and disequilibrium, order and disorder are essentially a function of the relations of coherence between the discourses involved, of the compati-bilities and contradictions that exist between them. Moreover, a definitive equilibrium, a condition of total plenitude, is always an impossibility. Dis-equilibrium, particularly in the form of dramatic conflict, is actually a means of containing that impossibility: it sutures* a lack which, if the equilibrium were to be simply maintained, would insist all the more strongly, all the more uncomfortably in the interstices of an ever more frenzied repetition.

Genres are modes of this narrative system, regulated orders of its potentiality. Hence it may be possible to begin here to indicate some of the elements of their specificity, some of the ways in which particular genres function simultaneously to exploit and contain the diversity of mainstream narrative. Firstly, it is neces-sary to consider the modes in which equilibrium and disruption are articulated, and the ways in which they are specified, represented differently and differen-

*In anatomy, suture refers to the stitching together of the lips of a wound in surgery. In psychoanalysis it refers to the juncture of the imaginary and the symbolic. For a further elaboration in this latter context see Stephen Heath, 'Notes on Suture', in *Screen*, Vol 18, no 4, Winter 1977/78 as well as the essays by J. A. Miller and J.-P. Oudart in the same issue.

tially, from genre to genre. In each case, the marks of generic specificity as such are produced by an articulation that is always constructed in terms of particular *combinations* of particular types or categories of discourse. The organisation of a given 'order' and of its disruption should be seen always in terms of conjunctions of and disjunctions between multiple sets of discursive categories and operations. For example, in the western, the gangster film and the detective film, disruption is always figured literally—as physical violence. Disequilibrium is inaugurated by violence which marks the process of the elements disrupted and which constitutes the means by which order is finally (re)established. In each case, equilibrium and disequilibrium are signified specifically in terms of Law, in terms of the presence/absence, effectiveness/ineffectiveness of legal institutions and their agents. In each case too, therefore, the discourses mobilised in these genres are discourses about crime, legality, justice, social order, civilisation, private property, civic responsibility and so on. Where they differ from one another is in the precise weight given to the discourses they share in common, in the inscription of these discourses across more specific generic elements, and in their imbrication across the codes specific to cinema. Of course, there are other genres which deploy figurations of violence. But the difference resides in the nature of the discourses and discursive categories employed in the specification of the order disrupted and the disorder instituted by that disruption.

For instance, violence also marks the horror film, most evidently in films where a monster—werewolf, vampire, psychopath or whatever—initiates a series of acts of murder and destruction which can only end when it itself is either destroyed or becomes normalised, i.e. becomes 'the norm', as in some of Polanski's films (*Rosemary's Baby, Dance of the Vampires*) or in Herzog's *Nosferatu.* But what defines the specificity of this particular genre is not the violence as such, but its conjunction with images and definitions of the monstrous. What defines its specificity with respect to the instances of order and disorder is their articulation across terms provided by categories and definitions of 'the human' and 'the natural'. The instances where the 'monster' is not destroyed but ends instead by pervading the social fabric in relation to which it functioned as 'monster', thus becoming integrated into it, becoming normalised, constitute a special option for the horror genre, testifying to the relative weight of discourses carrying the human/nature opposition in its discursive regime, relativising or even displacing entirely the Law/disorder dichotomy in terms of which violence operates in the western, the detective and gangster films. The monster, and the disorder it initiates and concretises, is always that which disrupts and challenges the definitions and categories of the 'human' and the 'natural'. Generally speaking, it is the monster's body which focuses the disruption. Either disfigured, or marked by a heterogeneity of human and animal features, or marked only by a 'non-human' gaze, the body is always in some way signalled as 'other', signalled, precisely, as monstrous. A variant on this is the inscription of a disruption in the spatio-temporal scales governing the order of the 'human' and of 'nature', producing figures such as giants—be they animals or humans—or, alternatively, homunculi, dwarfs, and so on. In other words, the order involved here is explicitly metaphysical. Moreover, narrative disruption

21

and disequilibrium are specified overtly in terms of discursive disjunctions between 'the empirical' ('the real') and 'the supernatural' ('the unnatural'), as well as between the concatenation of diegetic events and the discourses and discursive categories used by the characters (and, often, the audience) to understand them. *Psycho* is a perfect case in point. The events that occur are 'explained' in a way which upsets conventional categories of character motivation and sexual identity, although in this instance the 'metaphysics' are given a 'scientific' rather than a religious character. The latter tends to predominate in the gothic horror film—such as *Dracula*, or *Frankenstein*—where 'unnatural' acts of brutality and destruction, 'impossible' metamorphoses of identity, 'supernatural' happenings of all kinds, defy the principles both of common sense and of science—at least as these are defined in the films. Hence the narrative process in the horror films tends to be marked by a search for that discourse, that specialised form of knowledge which will enable the human characters to comprehend and to control that which simultaneously embodies and causes its 'trouble'. The function of characters such as the psychiatrist in *Psycho* or Van Helsing in the *Dracula* films is precisely to introduce and to articulate such a discourse.

In the musical and the melodrama, violence may figure in an important way, as it does for instance in *West Side Story* or *Written on the Wind*, but it is not a defining characteristic as such, either in terms of the register of disruption or in terms of its diegetic specification. In both genres the narrative process is inaugurated by the eruption of (hetero)sexual desire into an already firmly established social order. That is to say, the discourse of the law and 'criminality' is marginalised although by no means eliminated, while the metaphysical discourse of the horror genre is either refused entirely or explicitly designated as phantasy. The role of the policeman in *West Side Story* and that of the court in *Written on the Wind*, when compared to the roles these agencies of the legal apparatus play in *Anatomy of a Murder* (each in its own way a family romance), illustrate the difference in status of the legal discourse in the different genres. In the melodrama and the musical, the eruption of sexuality is not inscribed primarily across the codes of legality, as it can be in the thriller or the detective genre, and even, occasionally, in the western (e.g. *Stagecoach*). On the contrary, the disequilibrium inaugurating the narrative movement is specified as the process of desire itself and of the various blockages to its fulfilment within an apparently 'common sense', established social order. In other words, the process of desire in melodrama interrupts or problematises precisely the order the discourse and actions of the law have established in the face of 'lawlessness' and social disorder. Melodrama thus puts into crisis the discourses within the domain circumscribed by and defined as the legally established social order, the kind of order instituted at the end of westerns and detective films. Melodrama does not suggest a crisis of that order, but a crisis within it, an 'in house' rearrangement.

In short, it should be clearly understood that in each example mentioned here, I am not referring to elements which, in and of themselves, are absolutely exclusive to particular genres. Generic specificity is a question not of particular and exclusive elements, however defined, but of exclusive and particular com-

binations and articulations of elements, of the exclusive and particular weight given in any one genre to elements which in fact it shares with other genres. Heterosexual desire, the element mentioned here, is of course by no means exclusive to the musical or to the melodrama. But the role it plays in these genres is specific and distinctive. Not only does it have a much greater functional role in the generation of the narrative, not only does it provide the motivation for the actions of the principal characters, it also occupies a central as opposed to a secondary or peripheral place in the discursive ensemble mobilised and shaped by these particular genres. In short, its presence is a necessity, not a variable option.

In the musical, desire and satisfaction are generally signified in terms of two sets of discursive oppositions: firstly, that between the private and the public, and secondly, that between social success and failure. Each of these two sets is then articulated across a scale whose polar instances are harmony on the one hand and discord on the other.

Harmony and discord are terms used to specify aspects of equilibrium and disequilibrium in music. In this context, they are used to suggest that it is the specific inscription of music as the determining principle in the arrangement of sound-image relations as well as of relations between elements within the image that distinguishes the genre as such. It is the specific inscription of music into the plurality of discourses that constitute the text which ultimately shapes, determines and marks the register in which equilibrium and disequilibrium achieve their most intense expression and in which narrative resolution finally occurs. In other words, sequences of song and dance represent a shift in the regime of the narrative discourse, marked, for example, by a different articulation of body and voice. These sequences, this 'other' regime, woven into the narrative, allow a particularly intense and coherent statement of the conflicts, tensions and problems that traverse the narrative as a whole. They also, at certain points in some musical films, represent the terms of a resolution to these conflicts, tensions and problems; in the 'Dancing in the Dark' sequence in *The Bandwagon*, the fact that Cyd Charisse and Fred Astaire dance together so perfectly indicates that their initial hostility to one another will be and to a large extent already has been resolved in terms of a rhythmical interaction of their bodies. Whether such a resolution occurs in all song and dance sequences or not, the point here is that these musically determined sequences, in their completion and perfection, represent the discursive mode in relation to which resolution or lack of resolution are to be measured and through which stability and equilibrium are ultimately to be achieved.

Of course, the body and the voice are not the only elements involved here — decor, colour, dress, camera movement, editing and so on are all involved; all are transformed and integrated, all are subject to an explicitly aesthetic form of organisation in so far as it is music which governs the arrangement of signifying relations between and within images as well as between image and sound. This may be why the musical has come to be regarded as the most 'stylised', the most 'aestheticised' of genres, and why it is marked by the constant presence of discourses on art, entertainment and show business.

23

Finally, the different forms of comedy work by specifying disruption in relation to discourse itself. Crazy comedy tends to articulate order and disorder across the very mechanisms of discourse, producing incongruities, contradictions and illogicalities at the level of language and code, while social (situation) comedy, on the other hand, tends to specify its disorder as the disturbance of socially institutionalised discursive hierarchies. It is important to stress that these two forms are indeed only tendencies. There are overt social implications in much of the comedy of Chaplin, the Marx Brothers, Tashlin and Hawks, just as there are frequent instances of a play with the logical mechanisms of discourse in Lubitsch, Capra and Sturges. But nevertheless the two types of comedy remain distinct as specific emphases and tendencies.

Paul Willemen has pointed to the mode of operation of crazy comedy in his discussion of the workings of the gags in Tashlin's cinema. He stresses in particular the extent to which these gags are dependent upon specifically semiotic sets of logic, the extent to which they function by treating the elements in a situation as units of a language:

'. . . there are a great number of gags based on variations of the basic forms of combination. If we accept that the basic forms of combination consist of the bringing together of two or more items to produce a new structure, then a variation is constituted by such gags as the baby getting lost in the powder in *Rock-A-Bye-Baby* or the man in a plaster cast disappearing in *The Disorderly Orderly*. The plaster cast gag is not merely a form of subtraction, because the viewer is not supposed to consider the unfortunate invalid as a composite of parts of equal value—plaster cast plus man. In the same way, neither is a powdered baby regarded as a combination of two elements of equal value, either of which can be withdrawn from the equation—the baby without the powder/the powder without the baby. In this way, Tashlin's gags of this kind literally deconstruct, disassemble visual/semantic units.'[2]

At the purely verbal level, where mechanisms of this kind are at their most overt as operations of discourse, one could point to a number of examples in the Marx Brothers films, where dialogue follows a logic of its own, thus leading to semantic and dramatic absurdities: 'I know where the suspects are: they're in the house next door'—'But there isn't any house next door'—'Then we build a house next door'. As detectives in *Animal Crackers*, they reason their way from 'This portrait was painted by a left-handed painter' to 'This picture was eaten by a left-handed moth'.

Many of Chaplin's gags, to return to the situation level, are dependent upon a mixing of the registers of behaviour and action. The meal of boots in *The Gold Rush* is a classic example, as is the making of the bed in a water-filled trench in *Shoulder Arms*. Both depend upon a logic in which behaviour is both logical and illogical, both appropriate and inappropriate given the situation in which it takes place. In both instances, however, there are also overt 'social' implications to the gags and to the structure upon which they depend.

Social comedy proper proceeds by mapping the field of a socio-discursive order, a field whose nodal points tend constantly to be those of class and sexu-

ality. The order is disturbed in order for its hierarchy to be re-arranged. The establishment of a new, 'better' hierarchy is the condition of narrative closure. Capra's films are particularly clear examples. Thus both in *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington* and in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* the initial narrative equilibrium is specified in markedly 'social' terms (in *Mr. Smith* it concerns political institutions and is centred on the Senate; in *Mr. Deeds* it concerns wealth, particularly as centred in and distributed by financial institutions). That equilibrium, centred in each case in the city, is presented as both corrupt and unjust and yet as normative within its milieu. A naive, 'idealistic' character comes from outside and operates, in narrative terms, to re-order the initial elements so that the final equilibrium is different, and to focus that re-ordering as ethically necessary. The outsider is the bearer of a discourse which, in its contrast with the city discourses, produces humour and comedy, and which in its principles articulates the terms in relation to which the final equilibrium is to be measured.

Genre, Narrative and Subject

Narrative is not simply a product or a structure, nor even a process of production, an activity of structuration. It is both a process of production and an activity of structuration, but it is so in and for a subject. The subject is a function, or better, a functioning of signification. Different modes of signification produce different functionings of subjectivity, moving the subject differently in their various semiotic processes, producing distinct modes of address. Mainstream narrative is a mode of signification which works constantly to produce coherence in the subject through and across the heterogeneity of the effects that it mobilises and structures. Specifying its effects as narrative functions, pulling those functions into figures of symmetry and balance, mainstream narrative binds together, implicating the subject as the point where its binding mechanisms cohere, the point from where the deployment and configuration of discourses makes 'sense'. The subject thus is 'carried through against the dispersion, the multiple intensities of the text of the film'.[3]

Coherence, therefore, is not simply a fact of closure, of the achievement of the stability of an equilibrium, of the production of a final unified position. It is also and equally a fact of the process which leads to that closure, of the balance of the movement of positioning that disequilibrium itself involves. Its operation is complex and multiple rather than simple and single. Narrative disruption, for example, does not involve the disturbance of one subject position as such, but rather the disturbance of a set of positions, the production of a disphasure in the relations between a plurality of positions inscribed in a plurality of discourses.[4] The coherence of mainstream narrative derives largely from the way in which that disphasure is contained as a series of oscillations that never exceed the limits of 'dramatic conflict' (that never, therefore, exceed the limits of the possibility of resolution), and from the way in which such conflict is always, ultimately, articulated from a single, privileged point of view.

Fundamental, then, to the economy of the subject in mainstream narrative, to the economy of its mode of address, is the achievement of the maintenance

25

of a coherent balance between process (enunciation) on the one hand, and position (enounced) on the other. But this economy can be structured in a variety of ways. Genres represent systematisations of that variety. Each genre has, to some extent at least, its own system of narrative address, its own version of the articulation of the balance. Each genre also, therefore, engages and structures differently the two basic subjective mechanisms which any form of the balance involves: the want for the pleasure of process, and the want for the pleasure of its closure.

For example, consider the detective film and the characteristic mode of its narrative address, suspense. Suspense is not, of course, exclusive to the detective genre, but it is nonetheless essential to it, tying in as it does with a narrative structured around the investigation of the principle of narrative disorder itself in the sense that the enigma is a mystery, an 'incoherence' functioning as the trigger for a story, which, as it unfolds, eliminates the enigma and comes to an end when its disorder has been abolished. The narrative of the detective genre thus directly dramatises the tension inherent in the signifying process through the mobilisation of a series of discourses concerned specifically with the Law, with the symbolic and with knowledge. What the enigma-investigation structure serves to effect is an amplification of the tension inherent in all 'classic' narratives: the tension between process (with its threat of incoherence, of the loss of mastery) and position (with its threat of stasis, fixity or of compulsive repetition, which is the same thing in another form). This tension, which informs all semiotic systems in so far as they are grounded in desire, realises itself in two distinct forms of pleasure: firstly, the potential 'boredom' of stasis; and, secondly, pleasure in position in the face of the anxieties potentially attendant on unlimited process. The amplification of this tension is largely due to the fact that the detective film dramatises the signification process itself as its fundamental problem: the Law is at issue directly in the investigation, that is to say, in the play between two fluctuatingly related sets of knowledge, that of the detective and that of the audience. In the detective film, the detective *and* the audience have to make sense of a set of disparate events, signs and clues. The 'risk' for the detective being represented in the narrative is a risk of violence and death. The risk for the audience is a loss of sense and meaning, the loss of a position of mastery. On the other hand, though, for the audience the process of the narrative is the primary source of its pleasure. The viewing subject is thus suspended in a structure which stretches the tensions of classic narrative to breaking point though never, axiomatically, beyond it.

There is an important dimension to suspense, and indeed to narrative address in general, which, again, the detective film illustrates particularly well. Narrative is always and essentially a means of organising and articulating process, of organising and articulating both the temporal flow of the text, and the flow, the fluctuation of the subject within it. In the words of Stephen Heath, narrative is thus always and essentially

'a system which, positioning and effecting, is a ceaseless performance *of the subject in time for the reality given, of subject-time*. The performance of

26

subject-time is itself a complex time, phasing between two constant moments that—these remarks concern classic narrative cinema, the commercial exploitation of film—are layered together: the subject-reflection and subject-process (the layering and balance of the two being the film's performance of subject-time). The subject-reflection is a narrative effect (or series of effects): in the movement of the chain of differences—the flow of multiple intensities of image and sound—the narrative defines terms for the movements of the chain, specifies relations and reflects a subject as the direction of those relations, produces the coherence of view and viewer. Going along with the subject-reflection, the subject-process is just that: the *process*, all the elements of the system in its production-performance, the whole apparatus of the representation; is a *multiple circulation*, the perpetual movement of difference. . .'[5]

Mainstream narrative regulates complexly the times of its semiotic processes by balancing, on the one hand, points of advance in ceaselessly pushing the flow of text and subject forward, and, on the other hand, points of recall in ceaselessly containing that process in figures of repetition, folding it back on itself into the retrospective coherence of memory. But it can do so in a variety of ways, through a variety of modes of address institutionalised in a variety of genres.

Returning to the detective film, the function of the enigma is to structure the generation of suspense, but it achieves this not simply by articulating the narrative as a puzzle, but also by specifying the puzzle in particular temporal terms. The enigma focuses two initially separate times, the past time of the story behind the crime and the present time of its reconstruction.[6] Indeed the enigma in many ways is that separation of times. Eventually, the two times are brought together coherently and the enigma is resolved. A coherent memory is thus constructed across the separate instances of the story of the crime, the story of its investigation, and the process of the text itself: the memory constructed within the film duplicates the memory constructed by the film. This temporal duplication, the creation of a double temporal tension, is precisely that which marks and generates the tension referred to earlier. It is therefore also that which marks and generates its suspense, the temporal dimension of which has been outlined by Barthes as follows:

'On meeting in "life", it is most unlikely that the invitation to take a seat would not immediately be followed by the act of sitting down; in narrative these two units, contiguous from a mimetic point of view, may also be separated by a long series of insertions belonging to quite different functional spheres. Thus is established a kind of logical time which has very little connection with real time, the apparent pulverization of units always being firmly held in place by the logic that binds together the nuclei of the sequence. Suspense is clearly only a privileged—or exacerbated—form of distortion: on the one hand, by keeping a sequence open (through emphatic procedures of delay and renewal), it reinforces the contact with the reader (the listener), has a manifestly phatic function; while on the other, it offers the threat of an uncomplicated sequence, of an open paradigm (if, as we believe, every sequence has two poles), that is to say, of a logical disturbance,

27

it being this disturbance which is consumed with anxiety and pleasure (all the more so because it is always made right in the end).'[7]

This point, apparently so banal, is in fact fundamental not only for understanding the economy of pleasure in the mainstream text, but also for understanding the function of genres themselves: genres institutionalise, guarantee coherence by institutionalising conventions, i.e. sets of expectations with respect to narrative process and narrative closure which may be subject to variation, but which are never exceeded or broken. The existence of genres means that the spectator, precisely, will always know that everything will be 'made right in the end', that everything will cohere, that any threat or any danger in the narrative process itself will always be contained.

Suspense is equally as powerful and equally as characteristic, with respect to generic address, both in the gangster film and in the thriller. These genres, however, inscribe their suspense differently, through different narrative structures and in conjunction with different diegetic conventions. Suspense in the gangster film derives from an amplification of the tensions of narration, not by augmenting the threat of incoherence through the constitution of the narrative as a puzzle, nor by specifying that tension across a temporal axis of past and present. Instead, it is achieved, firstly, by identifying the necessity for the existence of the narrative with the existence of the gangsters' activities while identifying the necessity for narrative closure with the existence of the Law. In the gangster film, of course, the Law tends to be specified in terms of a particular, datable, historical law, such as prohibition. The Law in the detective film is less specific, coming often to function as the signifier of symbolic Law itself. The pleasures and anxieties of position are thus made more complex by being articulated across an ideological division between the legal and the illegal. Since the former provides the grounds for a primary identification with the narrative as such, and since the latter provides the grounds for secondary forms of identification, a series of potential gaps and contradictions opens up, across which narrative and subject are suspended. Secondly, suspense is achieved by structuring the narrative across an axis of present and future. One of the major activities in which the gangsters engage is planning—the planning of robberies, assassinations, vendettas, and so on, of activities which will serve to sustain and increase individual as well as corporate wealth and power. The narrative and its subject are thus constantly anticipating. It is the play with this anticipation, the tension in the potential or actual difference between what is planned and what occurs, which provides a major means by which suspense is engendered and articulated in the gangster film, both at the micro-narrative level (the level of scene or segment) and at the level of the structure of the narrative as a whole.

Suspense involves a particular form of affect, what Barthes has called a 'thrilling of intelligibility',[8] and it is to this form that the generic label 'thriller' refers. The thriller in fact may involve a variety of narrative structures and may create its suspense in various ways. It may borrow elements from the detective film: the positing of an enigma—Hitchcock's McGuffin—and the use of an investigative structure; or it may borrow from the gangster film, playing off identification and pleasure by focusing much of the narrative on the activities

28

of a criminal protagonist; or it may use elements and structures of its own. One of the commonest of these involves the playing of its protagonist in a position such that he (or, occasionally, she) is under threat both from a set of criminals and from the Law. Examples here would include Lang's *Woman in the Window*, Sirk's *Shockproof* and, of course, many of Hitchcock's films—*Strangers on a Train, The Thirty Nine Steps, North by Northwest* and so on. This increases not only the danger to the protagonist, but also the number and complexity of the tasks that have to be performed if all the ends of the story are to be brought together coherently, if the narrative is to end 'satisfactorily'. Thus the wish for the narrative to continue is articulated across the fact that this involves a considerable number of risks, while the wish for it to end is articulated across the fact that the complexity of the situation in which the protagonist finds himself has fully to be worked out. Whatever the structure, whatever the specificity of the diegesis in any particular thriller, the genre as a whole, unlike that of the gangster or the detective story, is specified in the first instance by its address, by the fact that it always, though in different ways, must have the generation of suspense as its core strategy.

Other genres are marked by other modes of narrative address, other ways of articulating the two 'wants' of narrative, suspending the subject in other structures of affect. In comedy, for instance, the mode of affect is laughter, a release of pleasure which comes from a structuring of the two narrative wants and pleasures across the point of intersection of two (or more) discourses, of two (or more) discursive structures or regimes, together with the economy, the appropriateness—the wit—with which the contradictions and resistances generated between them are overcome. This may occur firstly through a 'triumph' over that which is represented to be resisting, as, for example, in many of Buster Keaton's films, where what is signified as resisting is often, simply, 'reality'. Here laughter comes not only from the overcoming of the resistance, but also, and primarily, from the fact that that overcoming involves a drastic (but coherent) re-ordering of the logic of the discourses which, together, define the field and order of 'reality' in the film concerned. Alternatively, and secondly, it may come about through the 'triumph' of that which resists (as, for example, in a banana peel gag). Laughter here stems in particular from the way in which an anticipation of the inevitable is played across the specific temporal articulation of the event anticipated, from, precisely, the timing of the gag, joke or comic scene, the temporal—and logical—economy with which it is structured and realised, the suspense it embodies. Excellent examples of this type of comedy where gags are as it were telegraphed in advance but achieve their effect exclusively through timing, through the variations of the 'delay' between cause and effect, are to be found in Blake Edwards' work, and particularly in the *Pink Panther* series. The particularity of the address of melodrama derives from an articulation of the mechanisms of the suspense basic to any narrative across a representation of the vicissitudes of (hetero)sexual desire as they, in turn, articulate with a series of discourses about class, sexuality, property and the family. The representation of desire itself engages 'directly', so to speak, the twin pleasures of narrative by giving them representation in

29

terms of (a specific version) of desire itself. The tension between them is thereby heightened, since the wish for the narrative to continue is structured as directly in conflict with a wish for the representation of fulfilment of desire, while the wish for the narrative to end coherently is organised in conflict with a pleasure in the process of desire itself. The articulation thus produced is responsible for the particular poignancy with which the melodrama as a genre is associated, irrespective of whether any individual melodrama has a 'happy' ending or a 'sad' one. This because there is, in fact, always an experience of loss involved in the *mise en scène* of desire, stemming from the nature of desire itself, in that temporally and structurally its very existence is a function of lack.

Finally, the musical, though not perhaps associated with any particular mode of affect, has a particular form of address which stems from its balance of narrative and spectacle. As Patricia Mellencamp has noted,[9] moments of spectacle, generally in the form of singing and dancing, are always separated off, to some degree at least, from the linear flow of the story. These moments are moments of intense gratification and pleasure, realising the desire for coherence and process simultaneously in a harmony of bodily movement, voice, music and *mise en scène*. They tend to occur in particular at points of stress (whether for the characters, the narrative or the subject and its pleasures and desires), thus contributing towards an economy which in many ways is the antithesis of that of the genres of suspense: 'These breaks [in the narrative, instances of spectacle] displace the temporal advance of the narrative, providing immediate, regular doses of gratification rather than delaying the pleasures until The End.'[10]

Spectacle itself, however, cannot be sustained for any length of time without variation (otherwise the lack at the base of its apparent plenitude would begin to insist, thus disturbing the gratification). Hence the necessity, as far as mainstream cinema is concerned, for the narrative to return in order to provide that variation in a time that extends beyond that of the 'spectacular moment' itself. Therefore, rather than the two being in conflict, with spectacle 'subverting' narrative, as Mellencamp tends to argue, they in fact function to reinforce and support each other, the 'deficiencies' of the one being minimised by the 'virtues' of the other, and vice-versa. Moreover, in providing two registers of discourse within the overall coherence of a contained textual system, the musical doubles the possibilities of its semiotic effects while simultaneously doubling the forms of their coherence. Doubling the play of its desires and pleasures, it simultaneously doubles the modes of their binding together.

Genre and Cinema

The cinematic institution exists predominantly to produce narrative, cinema as narrative, but equally, and thereby defining its place within the social formation as a whole, it exists to produce narrative as cinema. The regime of meaning and pleasure, the discursive order specific to the mode of narrative it employs, is produced in conjunction with the regimes of meaning and pleasure specific to cinema: narrative produced as cinematic narrative, through the matters of

expression and the codes specific to cinema that historically have become institutionalised.

Cinema includes all the facilities of sound and of the moving photographic image. These together form the basis of its specificity as a signifying medium. The codes of cinema (codes of editing, camera movement, spatio-temporal configuration) exist to order those facilities, and, in mainstream cinema, both are subordinate to, regulated by, narrative. Thus, for instance, movement is contained as narrative continuity and space as narrative scene: 'Filmic procedures are to be held as narrative instances (very much as "cues"), exhaustively, without gap or contradiction.' (Stephen Heath).[11] Cinema, then, is contained as narrative. But the term to stress here is 'contain': there is no question either of effacement or of transparency: 'It is too readily assumed that the operation—the determination, the effect, the pleasure—of classical cinema lies in the attempt at an invisibility of process, the intended transparency of a kind of absolute "realism" from which all signs of production have been effaced. The actual case is much more complex and subtle, and much more telling. Classical cinema does not efface the signs of production, it contains them.' (Stephen Heath).[12]

Moreover, such containment can and does allow for (regulated) forms of excess, and (regulated) forms of the display of its process: part of the very function of genres is precisely to display a variety of the possibilities of the semiotic processes of mainstream narrative cinema while simultaneously containing them as genre. Hence the musical 'with its systematic "freedom" of space—crane, choreography—and its shifting balances of narrative and spectacle . . .';[13] or the film noir, with its display of the possibilities of chiaroscuro lighting, frequently unmotivated, diegetically impossible; or the epic, with all the resources of cinema in terms of widescreen, decor, colour, costume and so on invested in a spectacle which at many points simply goes beyond its strictly narrative function; or the science fiction film, where, from a certain perspective, the narrative functions largely to motivate the production of special effects, climaxing either with the 'best' of those effects (*Close Encounters of the Third Kind*), or with the point at which they are multiplied with greatest intensity (*Star Wars*).

The problem of cinematic specificity, beyond its definition in terms of particular matters of expression and the codes that traverse them, also poses the question as to what kind of subject it constructs, what kind of subjective mechanisms it engages and the way in which it organises them. Cinematic specificity is therefore, above all, a question as to the nature of what Christian Metz has termed 'the cinematic signifier':

'It is indeed well known that different "languages" (painting, music, cinema, etc.) are distinguished from one another—and are first several—by means of their signifiers, in the physical and perceptual definitions of those signifiers as well as in the formal and structural features that flow from them, and not by means of their signifieds, or at any rate, not immediately . . . There is no signified which is peculiar to literature or on the contrary to cinema, no "great global signified" that might be attributed to painting itself, for

31

example (= one more mythical avatar of the belief in the ultimate signified). Each means of expression allows everything to be said: by "everything" I mean an indefinite number of things, broadly coinciding from one language to another. Obviously each one says them in its own way, and that is precisely why it sometimes seems that there should be such a great signified. But a signified which is still very badly named, since it can only be approached in terms of a signifier: the cinematic does not consist of some static list of themes or subjects which are supposed to be especially apt for the cinema and for which the other arts have a lesser "vocation" (a truly metaphysical conception, proceeding by essences), it can only be defined, or rather foreseen, as a special way of saying anything (or nothing), i.e. as a signifier effect: a specific coefficient of signification (and not a signified) linked to the intrinsic workings of the cinema and to its very adoption rather than that of another machine, another apparatus.'[14]

Following the passage quoted here, Metz goes on to indicate some of the properties of the cinematic signifier, and to specify some of their effects, in terms of the subject relations they institute and structure, that is to say, in terms of the spectating subject they inscribe. It is worth outlining some of these properties and effects, especially in the forms in which they have been institutionalised in mainstream cinema, in order to relate them to the functioning of the cinematic genres and to their respective specificities. The basic characteristic of the cinematic signifier is its fundamentally 'fictional' status. Like theatre and opera, cinema engages a large number of perceptual registers. But unlike them, the various perceptual mechanisms centre around objects which are not in themselves physically present:

'The actor, the "decor", the words one hears are all absent, everything is recorded (as a memory trace which is immediately so, without having been something else before), and this is still true if what is recorded is not a "story" and does not aim for the fictional illusion proper, for it is the signifier itself, and as a whole, that is recorded, that is absence.'[15]

As such, the cinematic signifier is 'closer to fantasy at the onset', engaging the imaginary in an especially profound and forceful way:

'Thus the cinema, "more perceptual" than certain arts according to the lists of its sensory registers, is also "less perceptual" than others once the status of these perceptions is envisaged rather than their number or diversity: for its perceptions are all in a sense false. Or rather, the activity of perception in it is real (the cinema is not a fantasy), but the perceived is not really an object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror . . . The unique position of the cinema lies in this dual character of its signifier: unaccustomed perceptual wealth, but unusually profoundly stamped with unreality, from its very beginning. More than the other arts, or in a more unique way, the cinema involves us in the imaginary: it drums up all perception, but to switch it immediately over into its own absence, which is nonetheless the only signifier present.'[16]

32

Hence the double simultaneous emotional investment in cinema, firstly, as the trace and the mirror (the guarantee) of reality, i.e. of the number, diversity and density of perceptual registers deployed; and, secondly, as one of the primary vehicles of narrative fiction, defined as the correlation between the 'fictional' aspect of the cinematic signifier and the fictions it is used to construct. This double investment undermines not only the fictional narratives characterised by the wholesale adoption of the conventions of 'realism', it also programmes, to some extent at least, the fantasies of critics such as Bazin in search of the elusive (because impossible) synthesis of one with the other.

The double investment required and solicited by cinema has certain consequences for the spectating subject constructed by the cinematic institution: the fundamental implication of quite specific modes of scopophilia, exhibitionism and fetishism. Scopophilia, a drive which has the look as its object of desire, is evidently of crucial importance to the cinema. It is a drive that is dependent upon the maintenance of a distance between subject and object, and, as Metz notes, drives of this kind are characteristic of most of the 'major' arts. What distinguishes cinema from other arts such as theatre or opera is that distance is inscribed into its very signifier: all its objects are always already absent, present only as recorded traces: 'Not only am I at a distance from the object, as in the theatre, but what remains in that distance is no longer the object itself, it is a delegate it has sent me while itself withdrawing. A double withdrawal.' (C. Metz)[17] The implication of this 'double withdrawal' is, firstly, an intensifying of the scopic drive—hence the whole battery of devices and strategies for soliciting and containing scopophilia in mainstream narrative film, most notably, perhaps, the relay of 'looks' that it sets in play,[18] each working ultimately to satisfy, to afford pleasure, rather than to expose the subject in the gap, the 'want' founding scopophilia, like any other form of desire. The second implication, reinforcing the first, is that the aspect of exhibitionism in the object looked at, i.e. in the film itself, appears to be weakened:

'What defines the specifically cinematic scopic regime is not so much the distance kept, the "keeping" itself (first figure of the lack, common to all voyeurism), as the absence of the object seen. Here the cinema is profoundly different from the theatre as also from more intimate voyeuristic activities with a specifically erotic aim (there are intermediate genres, moreover: certain cabaret acts, striptease, etc.): cases where voyeurism remains linked to exhibitionism, where the two faces, active and passive, of the component drive are by no means so dissociated: where the object seen is present and hence presumably complicit . . .'[19]

The subject is thus all the more invisible, inscribed as 'unauthorised' voyeur by the film (of course, voyeurism is 'authorised' by the institution as a whole), and the instance of scopophilia involved 'is from the outset more strongly established than that of the theatre'. Metz goes on to point out that in this way, the scopophilia involved in the experience of watching a film is intimately related to the inscription of a viewer-voyeur in the primal scene phantasy (the

phantasy scene of watching parents making love). Moreover, the affinity be-
tween these two phantasy spectacles is reinforced, firstly by the arrangement
of the apparatus of exhibition: 'The obscurity surrounding the onlooker, the
aperture of the screen with its inevitable keyhole effect'; and secondly, by the
nature of what is exhibited: 'The filmic spectacle, the object seen, is more
radically ignorant of its spectator, since he is not there, than the theatrical
spectator ever can be.'[20] The film is then 'something that lets itself be seen
without presenting itself to be seen, which has gone out of the room before
leaving only its trace visible there'.[21] The arrangement is reinforced by the
way mainstream narrative organises its discourses, suppressing all the marks of
the subject of enunciation wherever possible. 'The film is not exhibitionist.
I look at it, but it does not look at me looking at it.'[22] Exhibitionism appears to
be weakened. However, as Metz himself notes, it is far from absent. It cannot be,
because cinema depends on voyeurism, and voyeurism is inseparable from
exhibitionism. Both must always exist together, and to precisely the same
degree. Hence all those strategies of mainstream cinema for soliciting the look:
'eye-catching' compositions, sets and costumes, the putting on display of stars
and decor and forms of movement and action. This is not to contradict Metz'
statements, merely to modify them: what happens in mainstream cinema is that
the instances of voyeurism and exhibitionism are constantly dislocated, the
latter, for example, constantly diegeticised, contained within the films which
appear to unreel, unsolicited, before the eyes of the spectator. Nonetheless the
modification needs to be made, because if the 'subject or enunciation' is taken
to be the cinematic institution itself, its marks are not absented but in fact
pervade mainstream narrative films, since films are there precisely to exhibit
cinema. Consider, for example, all the elements that can be grouped together
under the heading of 'production values'—sets, costumes, locations, stars, special
effects, expensive camera movements and so on. All these are marks of the
cinematic institution and are displayed to the spectator as such.

It should also be noted here that the institution not only renews itself
through the introduction and modification (updating) of such elements—sound,
colour and widescreens are only the most spectacular instances—but also that
such renewal takes place through the mechanisms of institutionalised exhibi-
tionism mentioned earlier. What should be noted too, and this is important for
my subsequent argument, is that this process takes place through conventionally
institutionalised forms of which genre is one of the most important. For instance,
the introduction of sound is displayed as and through the musical; widescreen is
introduced and displayed as and through the epic; more recently, a sophisticated
technology of special effects and sound are introduced and displayed as and
through a genre: science fiction (*Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third
Kind*).

This means that genres also exhibit cinema, with different genres functioning
to exhibit different aspects of its potentiality, each of them modulating in-
stances of scopophilia and exhibitionism in different ways. And while it is not,
I think, the case that each genre can be defined as systematically modulating
and engaging particular versions of these instances, it is the case that genres

34

such as the musical and the epic are conventionally held to be distinct from most of the others in respect of the degree of spectacle they involve.

The discursive instances in these genres to which the term 'spectacle' is generally applied are clearly instances of overt exhibitionism, diegetically motivated it is true, but often precisely by narrative actions in which exhibitionism plays an especially powerful and evident role. For example, theatre and cabaret, referred to by Metz as forms of entertainment in which exhibitionism is marked both through the presence of the subject/object on display and through the conventions structuring that presentation, are often essential ingredients of the diegesis of the musical. The musical's moments of spectacle and display are often moments of theatre (think, for instance, of the Busby Berkeley musicals or of the prevalent motif of 'putting on a show'). Cinema always exceeds theatre in such moments. That is the whole point—cinema inscribes theatre in order to demonstrate its superiority over theatre. But it does so in a controlled manner, the element of control stemming precisely from the initial diegetic motivation. Cinema never exceeds too much. Its exhibitionism is controlled, limited, just enough to entertain and impress the spectator, to satisfy and to legitimate his or her voyeurism.

Elements of theatre and 'cabaret' are also prevalent in the epic, as are entertainments that are specific to the genre—chariot races, gladiatorial combats and so on. The epic is also marked by other instances of spectacle such as parades, ceremonies and marches, instances which are motivated quite specifically as displays of power. In this way, the epic explicitly mobilises and thematises the sadistic and masochistic components of scopophilia and exhibitionism, both of which thus reflect and actively articulate the theme of power that characterises the genre as a whole. The former instances of entertainment—the chariot races and combats, displays of physical power and/or strength, are also involved here, since they always take place in a narrative context in which they are subject to the controlling gaze of a representative or representatives of whatever Ancient State Power happens to be the focus of the discursive representation in any particular epic film.

Of course, spectacle in these genres is not confined to their moments of diegetic exhibitionism, but such moments are indicative both of the degree of exhibitionism involved in the epic and in the musical, and, hence, of the specific modalities of spectacle that they each inscribe in their own way. In the epic, these moments are part of an overall process in which cinema displays itself and its powers through the re-creation of a past so distant that much of its impact derives simply from the evidence of the scale of re-creation involved (from details of costume and decor to the construction of whole cities) and through the telling of a story felt to match that scale, such as the story of Christ, the fall of the Roman Empire, and so on. In the musical, on the other hand, cinema is engaged in the production of spectacle as spectacle, in the demonstration of its own codes of signification in accordance with its own ideology of art. It is this demonstration which motivates and controls the degree to which those codes are displayed in the process of construction of art itself (singing and dancing, putting on a show), and the degree to which

discourses about art and entertainment are central to the genre.

Fetishism

Fetishism is a psychic structure which psychoanalysis has shown to be founded upon the disavowal of sexual difference. As such, it 'turns' on the privileged signifier of that difference (presence/absence of the phallus) and character-istically involves a 'splitting of belief' as in the phrase: 'I know very well this is so, and yet . . .' Cinema activates fetishistic structures in a number of ways. Firstly, the cinematic signifier itself is such that it initiates an oscillation in the 'regime of credence' which it provokes or allows. The cinematic signifier is perceptually present, but it nevertheless exists as a trace of absence. As Metz put it: 'The actor, the decor, the words one hears are all absent, everything is recorded . . . it is the signifier itself . . . that is recorded, that is absence.'[15] As such, the very status of the cinematic signifier inaugurates a 'splitting of belief', the regime of credence that can be characterised as 'I know very well, and yet . . .' (I know this is only cinema, and yet it is so 'present' . . .). Of course, there are other aspects of cinema, particularly of narrative-figurative cinema, which implicate viewers in fetishistic structures such as the use of stars' faces, represen-tations of the female figure, uses of dress, etc. These aspects of cinema have been examined by Laura Mulvey and Danièle Dubroux, among others.[23] In this context, the main point to note is that fetishism is a structure involving the production of regimes of credence and as such has a part to play in the 'reality effect' of cinema as well as in the establishing of the conventions of verisimili-tude. Metz made the provision that

> 'the precise nuance of the regime of credence that the spectator will adopt varies tolerably from one fictional technique to another. In the cinema, as in the theatre, the represented is by definition imaginary; that is what characterises fiction as such, independently of the signifier in charge of it. But the representation is fully real in the theatre, whereas in the cinema it too is imaginary, the material being already a reflection'.[24]

In mainstream narrative cinema, intent on the production of the viewer's adherence to a coherent and homogeneous diegesis, the fetishism of the signifier becomes further implicated in the fetishism of fiction itself:

> 'The audience is not duped by the diegetic illusion, it "knows" that the screen presents no more than a fiction. And yet, it is of vital importance for the correct unfolding of the spectacle that this make-believe be scru-pulously respected (or else the fiction film is declared "poorly made"), that everything is set to work to make the deception effective and to give it an air of truth (this is the problem of *verisimilitude*).'[25]

This 'problem of verisimilitude' is in fact complicated by the existence of genres, as each genre has its own particular conventions of verisimilitude, over and above those of mainstream narrative fiction as a whole. As Metz implies, verisimilitude is never a question of 'fidelity to the real' (however one defines

the real). It is always a function of systems of credibility, of modes of fetishistic belief. Within the overall framework of the 'regime of credibility' that mainstream narrative cinema itself represents, one in which the fetishism of narrative fiction is reduplicated by the fetishism of the cinematic signifier, genres function so as to provide and to institutionalise a variety of the possibilities of fictional credibility allied to a variety of the possibilities of 'cinematic credibility', thus binding the two together all the more strongly as the very ground of cinematic address, as the very basis of the relations between cinema and its spectators.

It should firstly be noted that some genres are conventionally considered to be 'more fictional' than others. Gangster films and war films, for example, tend to be judged according to strict canons of realism, whereas the musical, the gothic horror film and the phantasy/adventure film (i.e. films like *The Thief of Bagdad* or *Jason and the Argonauts*) are recognised as either being more 'poetic' or else as involving more of the faculty of 'imagination', as being closer to 'phantasy' than to 'reality'. This difference stems to a large degree from the status accorded the codes and discourses involved in the two kinds of genre. Those involved in the latter, more immediately 'fictional' genres are always already socially defined as 'fiction' in one way or another. That is to say, these genres consist of bundles of discourses already defined as pertaining to the domain of the subjective, to the domain of imagination and phantasy. At most, they are characterised as representing not factual reality but poetic or psychological realities. As the cinematic signifier is fictional from the outset, a property reinforced by the codes and discourses which combine to construct 'narrative fiction', these social definitions that precede the circulation of any given cinematic genre or text, in their turn reinforce this already double fictionality. Each of these three layers activates and strengthens the fictional potentialities of the others. However, in genres such as war films or gangster films, a number (by no means all) of the discourses and codes deployed overlap with discourses involved in genres socially defined, perhaps not quite as scientific or documentary, but at least as non-fictional, e.g. newspaper reporting, sociology, the adoption of the 'press release' or of the front page headline style characteristic of, for instance, the work of Sam Fuller. In this way, connotations of 'non-fiction' spill over into or become attached to certain genres because some of their component discourses are also produced, classified and circulated by institutions whose business is supposed to be 'facts' and 'truth' rather than fiction and phantasy. This helps to explain why different genres appear to favour different types of source material to legitimise their fiction and anchor their regime of credibility. One type of genres, the less insistently 'fictional' ones, will rely more on pronouncements by state agencies, government documents, history books, biographies, newspapers and newsreels, backed up with blueprints, maps, scale models, etc. On the other hand, the kinds of legitimating documents and references employed in the predominantly 'phantasy' genres will tend to be ancient texts, parapsychological treatises, myths, folklore, religion, etc. In the former, the fiction is balanced across the marks of a socially verified truth, while in the latter it is articulated in terms of socially classified phantasy. The two instances, however, do cross one another in genres like science fiction and psychological

horror, where the elements of fiction and phantasy are intermingled with discourses marked as science, i.e. as non-fiction.

Of course, the 'realistic' genres do not involve total belief in the accuracy or the reality of their modes of characterisation, nor in the veracity of their narrative events or diegetic details. The division of belief inherent in all fiction still operates. But the mode of authenticity involved, the regime of credibility inaugurated, produces a balance of belief attentuating or deflecting to some extent the fiction's obvious fictionality, minimising the 'danger' of the spectator being caught in the contradictions lying at the heart of the division itself, the contradictions the 'split' is there to disavow. Of course this 'danger' still remains present and can never be evacuated totally. It can surface whenever there is a clash between the demands of authenticity and those of narrative fiction, which is quite a common occurrence in a genre such as the epic, where the 'reality' of the past that forms the diegetic pretext is so different, so other, so distant, that many of the codes and discourses needed for its construction are either lacking altogether in any verifiable form, or are constantly at odds with the demands of the cinematic institution. The details of costume and decor may be 'right' (though there is always some degree of compromise between 'historical accuracy' and current fashion), but the codes of speech, behaviour and character motivation are often so 'evidently' those of Hollywood rather than those of 'the past' that the balance between the two is easily upset. For example, Howard Hawks makes this point in an interview with Peter Bogdanovich in *Movie*,[26] where, referring to *Land of the Pharaohs*, he complains:

'I don't know how a Pharaoh talks. And Faulkner didn't know. None of us knew . . . It was awfully hard to deepen [the scenes] because we didn't know how those Egyptians thought or what they said . . . You kind of lose all sense of values. You don't know who somebody's for and if you don't have a rooting interest, and you're not for somebody, then you haven't got a picture.'

Generally, though, the balance in these genres is easily managed. The danger is more likely to occur in the genres of 'phantasy', where all the levels involved are heavily invested with marks of the fictional which in turn demands rigorous conventionalisation together with complex signifying strategies if the requirements of credibility are to be fulfilled. It is no accident, therefore, that these genres have persistently been marginalised, relegated to the realms of escapism and utopia (as has the musical) or classified as suitable mainly for children and adolescents. Nor, incidentally, is it any accident that they provide the ground for certain forms of cinephilia, where a fetishistic desire to know 'all about' cinema is concentrated in those forms of cinema in which fetishism is 'most evidently' at work, and in which it is most likely to be 'exposed' as such. The horror film, the phantasy/adventure film and the science fiction film in particular seem to involve special demands on the spectator's faculties of belief and on the cinema's capacities for sustaining it. The degree of 'success' with which this is done is measured by the degree to which particular modes of affect horror, anxiety, fear, wonder—are supposed to be experienced by the spectator. This in itself is

indicative of the degree to which these genres are concerned with fetishism and fetishistic modes of belief. Horror, anxiety and fear are all linked to the problematic of castration, while 'wonder' is a function of a division of belief so strong that it often requires the imaginary attribution of two spectators, one of whom is completely duped while the other 'knows better' and is not taken in at all. Alain Bergala, writing about the nature and function of 'children's films', makes the point very clearly:

'The term "children's film" in fact functions as a standard of belief, designating a regime of make-believe where the child comes to occupy the imaginary position of the ideally naive, credulous spectator who takes images and fictions at face value. A regime very convenient for parents who in this way give themselves the illusion of accompanying their children to the cinema while it is they, as bashful spectators, who accompany themselves with a false image of childhood as if they dared not occupy the position of the credulous spectator without such delegation.'[27]

Finally, it is worth mentioning here the case of two genres with a special relationship to verisimilitude and to the fetishistic division of belief upon which its various forms depend, even though that relation does not necessarily entail particular consequences for the cinematic signifier itself. The first is that of the detective film, whose system of credibility as a genre depends upon an opposition between the laws of verisimilitude of the world of narrative and the truth that the unfolding of that narrative reveals. Tzvetan Todorov explained this aspect of the detective genre in the following terms:

'The revelation, that is, the truth, is incompatible with verisimilitude, as we know from a whole series of detective plots based on the tension between them. In Fritz Lang's film *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, this antithesis is taken to extremes. Tom Garrett wants to prove that the death penalty is excessive, that innocent men are often sent to the chair. With the help of his future father-in-law, he selects a crime which is currently baffling the police and pretends to have committed it: he skilfully plants the clues which lead to his own arrest. Up to that point, all the characters in the film believe Garrett to be guilty; but the spectator knows he is innocent—the truth has no verisimilitude, verisimilitude has no truth. Then a double reversal occurs: the police discover documents proving Garrett's innocence, but at the same time we learn that his attitude has been merely a clever way of concealing his crime—it is in fact Garrett who has committed the murder. Again the divorce between truth and verisimilitude is total: if we know Garrett to be guilty, the characters are obliged to believe he is innocent. Only at the end do truth and verisimilitude coincide, but this signifies the death of the character as well as the death of the narrative, which can only continue if there is a gap between truth and verisimilitude.'[28]

The point here is not that verisimilitude is somehow either ignored or foregrounded as investigated, but that the genre has its own laws of verisimilitude,

39

even if this law is, in Todorov's words, the law of anti-verisimilitude:

'By relying on anti-verisimilitude, the murder mystery has come under the sway of another verisimilitude, that of its own genre . . . There is something tragic in the fate of the murder mystery writer; his goal is to contest verisimilitude, yet the better he succeeds, the more powerfully he establishes a *new* verisimilitude, one linking his text to the genre to which it belongs.'[29]

What Todorov calls anti-verisimilitude precisely constitutes the basis of this genre's specific regime of verisimilitude. The detective genre turns on this splitting of belief, this fetishistic structure duplicating the fetishistic structure already inherent in cinema itself. As Paul Willemen pointed out in a discussion, the 'red herrings' are the explicit signifiers of this process in operation: they are the signifiers attracting or detouring the look in a process where we know very well they are red herrings, and yet . . . As in *Beyond a Reasonable Doubt*, the 'clues' planted are first red herrings for the readers of the *mise en scène*, i.e. the police, but then are revealed to have been red herrings for the viewers. Fritz Lang's film thus becomes, in Paul Willemen's words, a meditation on red herrings. Similarly, in other detective films, suspects are carefully signalled by means of 'sinister' lighting effects, acting tricks such as voice modulation, suspicious 'looks', 'significant' pauses, or camera movements drawing attention to a suspect presence of an unseen observer, or even close-ups of objects. Anti-verisimilitude only functions in relation to the establishment of a truth, and that truth can only be established if the consistency of the fiction is maintained. The convention of anti-verisimilitude means that 'suspension of disbelief', merely a misleading term for the splitting of belief, is actually integrated into the diegesis as a condition of the inherent narrative structure. It is not only the audience which has to suspend disbelief, it is also the character of the detective, the agent of the process of investigation and representative of the viewer in the diegesis, guiding the reading of the 'events'. But the twist lies, so to speak, in the fact that whereas the fictional detective suspends disbelief in order to discover the truth 'behind' the appearance, the spectator suspends disbelief in order to confirm the illusion, that is to say, the illusion of the fiction itself.

This structure of illusion and belief also constitutes the basis of comedy. Comedy always and above all depends upon an awareness that it is fictional.[30] What comedy does, in its various forms and guises, is to set in motion a narrative process in which various languages, logics, discourses and codes are, at one point or another—at precisely the points of comedy itself—revealed to the audience as fictions. This can occur in two basic forms. Firstly, it can occur in a mode in which the comic text itself periodically stresses its own artifice, in which the comedy stems primarily from the spectator's own credulity. A classic instance of this kind of comedy is Lubitsch's *To Be or Not To Be*, which sets up and constantly shifts between an extraordinarily complex set of layers of artifice and credulity.[31] The opening sequence in particular is exemplary. We are confronted quite clearly by a representation of Adolf Hitler. The figure we see before us is not Hitler himself, but an actor playing Hitler. Equally, however,

we are confronted with a desire to suspend our knowledge in order to participate in the construction of a conventional and coherent fiction. After all, there is always a gap between actor and role, especially in instances where the role is that of a real historical figure.[32] There is a clear hesitation here which exists precisely because the gap is not fully closed, as it were, by the address of the text at this point: the parodic commentary prevents that. Similarly, when we move on to what appears initially to be a scene taking place in the headquarters of a Nazi general, there is a hesitation initiated by the fact that there is no textual indication that the scene is not to be read 'straight'—i.e. that it is not to be taken at 'face value'—while on the other hand, the general is played by Jack Benny, the star of the film and known comic actor. It is only when we are shown that the scene we have been witnessing is a theatrical rehearsal that we know definitively that it is not 'real' in fictional, diegetic terms. But then, of course, our belief, our credulity, has only shifted one step back, so to speak, to the level of the meta-scene within which the rehearsal scene has taken place.

The alternative mode of comedy is one that only plays on the languages, the logics, discourses and codes which the text highlights within the diegesis and the fictional characters' relationships to them. This mode of comedy plays on verbal 'wit', confronting or overlaying one discursive logic with another as in Marx Brothers comedies; or plays on disjunctions between discourses, modes of dress, behaviour etc. in different classes or social groups as in the comedy of Frank Capra. In this type of comedy, the spectator is maintained in a continuous and undisturbed mode of belief, against which the modes of belief of the characters in the discourses they inhabit/employ are measured. Although it remains the case that the nature of the spectator's credulity, unquestioned as it may be, is such that a recognition of the fiction as fiction remains far more essential than in other fictional modes.

In both modes, at both ends of the spectrum of comedy, the comic effect itself derives from a triple structure of belief, with credulity, 'knowledge', and fetishism proper as the three constant functions which are disturbed variously across the two basic instances of subjectivity involved: that of the characters in the fiction, and that of the spectators of the fiction.

<div align="center">*   *   *</div>

Scopophilia and fetishism do not exist separately in mainstream cinema. They are interrelated in particular and determinate ways, firstly, across the instance of the image itself: lack 'filled' by detail as in Ophuls' images, by *mise en scène* and colour as in Nicholas Ray's work, by composition as in Murnau, by framing as in Welles' cinema—the subject held in the plenitude of the organisation of the image; and secondly, through the organisation as narrative, where lack is 'filled' through linear narrative flow, scopophilia engaged and contained in the movement from image to image, articulated as the visual mastery—the distance—of a coherence of point of view.

<div align="center">41</div>

Fetishism and scopophilia are also each implicated in the various moments of knowledge and belief that mainstream cinema entails, especially in so far as they are articulated with yet another of the drives that cinema engages: epistemophilia, the desire to know, to 'find out'. Clearly this drive is also a central component both of narrative itself and, especially, of the hermeneutic code isolated by Roland Barthes in his analysis of Balzac's short story *Sarrasine*.[33] The hermeneutic code moves the reader through the text by evoking questions and postponing answers up to the final conclusion.

All genres operate a conjunction of these drives and structures, and although they cannot, in my opinion, be consistently distinguished the one from the other in terms of particular balances between them, nevertheless, a number of genres do involve quite specific structural combinations of some or of all of them. In this way they can be said to fulfil what I have argued to be their primary function: that is to say, they function as instances of variation and regulation determining regimes of controlled variety.

The detective film, for example, and certain versions of the thriller, are marked by a particularly overt and insistent hermeneutic structure: the restoration of narrative equilibrium is conditional upon the establishment of a knowledge as to the cause or causes of the event initiating the narrative in the first place—a murder, a disappearance, a theft, a threat of blackmail, or whatever. The process of the narrative is a process of investigation, both on the part of the fictional detective or of the character who performs an analogous role, and on the part of the spectator. Like the detective, the spectator is constantly looking for clues and signs in a process of piecing together the reasons for the process of the crime, attempting to solve the enigma which structures the story. Hence the detective film and the thriller are genres which, so to speak, actively acknowledge and inscribe within their structures the practice of reading. Of course, they do so only in a containing and limited way, by means of an enclosed and linear hermeneutic structure, which is, precisely, a characteristic and defining convention of the genre itself.

Both the detective genre and the thriller inscribe the spectating subject as caught up in a particular version of epistemophilia, always engaging it to be 'satisfied', to be given the answer to the riddle. In other words, always engaging it in terms of the structure of fetishism. This is not by accident: disavowal and the desire to know are in fact always co-extensive, with epistemophilia being constantly displaced in order to preserve the fissure supporting/necessitating the fetish. Indeed it might be argued that fetishism itself is the product of the articulation of both these instances together, that it is a structure founded upon the modalities of the epistemophilic drive: the desire to know *and* disavowal, together, articulate a desire to know something else, a substitute for what in fact is at stake. The process of finding out is thus represented in relation to that which one wishes to avoid knowing. What is specific to the detective film and the thriller is the fact that this co-extensiveness is persistently demonstrated though never exposed to the fissure supporting it. It is not a matter of identifying or of finding the 'fetish' incarnated in any given clue, or in the last piece that makes the jigsaw 'fit', restoring a complete picture. On the contrary, it is the

jigsaw puzzle itself, the story of the crime that represents the structure of fetishism, the process of its institution and elaboration binding the spectator into the structure of (split) belief. In the detective and thriller genres, this story functions to restore 'law and order' in an overt and literal way: what 'fills the gap', what sutures the wound that the crime both represents and opens up, is, precisely, a narrative scarred by red herrings.

In the cinema as a whole, the epistemophilic component of fetishism is predominantly though by no means exclusively articulated via the scopic drive. It is then not surprising that the inscription of epistemophilia across the hermeneutic structures of the detective film and the thriller should constantly and characteristically involve quite overt diegetic references to voyeurism. Think, for example, of Polanski's *Chinatown* and of Altman's *The Long Goodbye*, films which construct a whole set of discourses about voyeurism around the character of the private eye. Or think of individual scenes in any number of detective films and thrillers in which the central protagonist is engaged, simply, in secretive looking. It is worth noting in this context that the many celebrated instances of voyeurism, exhibitionism and fetishism in the films of Alfred Hitchcock[34] are, partly at least, a function of the fact that Hitchcock makes thrillers: the thriller is a genre that consists of the elaboration of a narrative under the sign of these three drives, they are part—and arguably the dominant part—of the conditions of existence of the genre. It is also worth pointing out the extent to which the detective film and the thriller inscribe all these elements into the very fabric of the film text itself through the deployment of a heavy and insistent chiaroscuro giving rise to the sub-genre known as *film noir*. Darkness not only signifies concealment, invoking an unknown and unseen presence within it (thereby simultaneously invoking the desire to know and the desire to see); it is also a figure of absence and lack. Darkness is the edge between presence (that which it conceals) and absence (that which it is), and its ambiguity in this respect is reflected in its status *vis-à-vis* the cinematic signifier on the one hand and the diegesis of the other. It is not fully, completely and unambiguously a property of the narrative world, yet neither is it simply a property of the cinematic signifier as such. It hovers, oscillates between the two, thereby inscribing scopophilia and epistemophilia in relation to both.[35]

There is also, of course, a strong chiaroscuro tradition in the horror film, with shadow playing a similar role in relation both to epistemophilia and to the scopic drive. They frequently figure together, for instance, in those moments of suspense that centre on the appearance of a monster. Such moments are marked by a fascination with the monstrous that extends across the whole process of the narrative, and that exists despite, or rather all the more strongly because of, the elements of fear and anxiety that are simultaneously and inseparately involved. The precise nature of that fascination becomes clearer once it is recognised that all the elements involved here are central to the problematic of castration and that the horror film—centrally concerned with the fact and the effects of difference—invariably involves itself in that problematic and invariably mobilises specific castration anxieties. It does so, however, not so as radically to undermine the spectating subject, to expose the drives it

43

mobilises in the lack upon which they are founded, but to entertain it, to produce it in the coherence of a process, as a filling in, something which, given the specific articulation of the problematic of castration, involves an equally specific set of interrelated instances of fetishism. Hence the monster may represent the lack, but precisely by doing so it in fact functions to fill the lack with its own presence, thus coming to function as a fetish, simultaneously representing and disavowing the problems of sexual difference at stake. A process illustrated by the fact that many cinematic monsters have become favourite fetish images, as is evident from the enormous number of picture books, masks and toys devoted to them. A number of different strategies are used to stage the monster's appearance(s). Generally speaking, these appearances oscillate throughout the narrative, setting up a rhythm of presence and absence, with the movement of the film's narrative geared towards finding the appropriate means to symbolise and regulate that process through the appropriate formula or object, and thus to contain that irrevocable lack in the place of which the monster emerges. In this respect the play with the monster's appearance/disappearance is analogous to the *fort/da* game, the game of repeatedly making something appear and disappear. In *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Jacques Lacan stresses that the *fort* (gone) and the *da* (here) are not simple instances of presence on the one hand and absence on the other, with repetition constituting an oscillation between the two. On the contrary, both moments, as signifiers, are constructed in relation to absence, and therefore the game as a whole functions in relation to a fundamental and irrevocable lack that it serves only to contain (not to master) through the process of its repetition as a structure:

'The activity as a whole symbolises repetition, but not at all that of some need that might demand the return of the mother and which would be expressed in a simple cry. It is the repetition of the mother's departure as cause of a *Spaltung* (split) in the subject—overcome by the alternating game, *fort-da*, which is a *here or there*, and whose aim, in its alternation, is simply that of being the *fort* of a *da*, and the *da* of a *fort*. It is aimed at what, essentially, is not there, *qua* represented—for it is the game itself that is the *Representanz* of the *Vorstellung*.'[36]

But whatever strategy is used to stage the monster's mode of presence, it is a rule in mainstream cinema that whenever any kind of monster is involved, it must appear visibly at some point: a rule responsible for the problems Tourneur had with *Night of the Demon* (*Curse of the Demon*). This insistence is less a matter of commercial insensitivity to the subtleties of an artist, but more a fact deriving from the special way the problematic of castration underpins the horror film. Where monsters of the kind being discussed here do not figure at all, the 'horror' and its sources and effects tend to be addressed more 'directly'. In *Psycho*, for example, the interrelationship between castration and the constitution of sexual identity is clearly articulated, while Corman's Poe films constitute a veritable anthology of the ways in which the eye can come to figure in castration fantasies.[37]

Interconnected with this function of the monster is the enormous stress laid

not only on the moment(s) of its appearance, but also on the nature of its appearance. All the resources of the costume and make-up department are mobilised precisely to give the monster an appearance and an appearance that will not only frighten and terrify, but will also give it credence, an instance of the operation of the 'splitting of belief' fundamental to the structure of fetishism, and one which is merely part of a whole battery of such instances in the horror film, in which are invested all the faculties of cinematic 'trucage' (tricks, special effects and so on) that the cinematic institution can afford.[38] Moreover, it is no accident that the most 'spectacular' and intricate—the most arresting—mobilisation of 'trucage' centres so frequently either on the initial appearance of the monster or on its ultimate destruction; or even more tellingly, on its birth, the process of its construction 'there before our very eyes', an essential ingredient of the Frankenstein films, of the Jekyll and Hyde versions, the werewolf films and Hammer's *Dracula* series. A corollary of its birth is its disintegration—again, before our very eyes—as for instance in the first Hammer *Dracula*. These moments are significant and symptomatic because they are the pivotal moments in the fascination that the horror film involves, marking the 'turn' of the fetishistic division of belief upon which it is based.

The horror film, then, is a veritable festival of fetishistic effects, a complex imbrication of a whole variety of fetishistic structures and mechanisms operating across a number of distinct levels, each acting to reinforce the others. It is scarcely surprising, therefore, that the horror film is concerned so centrally not only with curiosity, knowledge and belief, but also, and crucially, with their transgressive and 'forbidden' forms and with the establishment of the terms and consequences in relation to which such forms are to be understood. It is thus also scarcely surprising that the discourses of the horror film are so frequently saturated with religion, while the critical discourses accompanying the genre are rooted in mysticism and other forms of irrationalism.

Notes

[1] C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', in *Screen*, Vol 16, no 2, p. 18.

[2] P. Willemen, 'Tashlin's Method: An Hypothesis', in C. Johnston and P. Willemen (eds), *Frank Tashlin*, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1973, pp. 122–124.

[3] Stephen Heath, 'Film and System: Terms of Analysis–Pt 1', in *Screen*, Vol 16, no 2, 1975. p. 99.

[4] P. Willemen, 'Notes on Subjectivity' in *Screen*, Vol 19, no 1, Spring 1978, pp. 58–59: 'Each text is in fact a network of intersecting and overlapping statements: quotations, references, derivations, inversions, etc. A text, any text, consists of a bundle of discourses, each discourse installing its subject of enunciation. This also means that it is misleading to describe a text as a signifying chain, i.e. *one* discursive operation corresponding to one subject-production. As texts are imbrications of discourses, they must necessarily produce series of subject positions. But these subjects can be (and are) mapped on to each other, pulled into place.'

[5] S. Heath, 'Film Performance' in *Cinetracts*, Vol 1, no 2, 1977, p. 9.

[6] T. Todorov, 'Detective Fiction' in *The Poetics of Prose*, Cornell University Press, 1977, pp. 44–47: 'At the base of the whodunit we find a duality, and it is this duality which will guide our description. This novel contains not one but two stories: the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. We might further characterise these two stories by saying that the first–the story of the crime–tells "what really happened", whereas the second–the story of the investigation–explains "how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it". The fundamental point is that this duality is articulated as a duality of times, of temporal orders.'

[7] R. Barthes, 'Structural Analysis of Narratives' in *Image, Music, Text*, S. Heath (ed), London 1978, p. 119.

[8] Ibid.

[9] P. Mellencamp, 'Spectacle and Spectator: Looking Through the American Musical Comedy' in *Cinetracts*, Vol 1, no 2, 1977.

[10] Ibid.

[11] S. Heath, 'Narrative Space' in *Screen*, Vol 17, no 3, 1976, p. 90.

[12] Ibid, p. 97.

[13] Ibid.

[14] C. Metz, op. cit., p. 42.

[15] Op. cit., p. 47.

[16] Op. cit., p. 48.

[17] Op. cit., p. 62.

[18] See S. Heath, 'Narrative Space', op. cit., and 'Anata Mo' in *Screen*, Vol 17, no 4; P. Willemen, 'Voyeurism, The Look and Dwoskin' in *Afterimage*, no 6.

[19] C. Metz, op. cit., p. 62.

[20] Op. cit., p. 64.

[21] Op. cit., p. 63.

[22] C. Metz, 'Histoire/Discourse, Notes on Two Voyeurisms' in *Edinburgh '76 Magazine*, no 1, p. 24.

[23] Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, Vol 6, no 3, and 'You don't know what is happening, do you Mr. Jones' in *Spare Rib*, no 8; D. Dubroux's review of *Fedora* in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 294 (English translation in *Fedora*, programme note available from BFI/EAS).

[24] C. Metz, 'The Imaginary Signifier', op. cit., p. 66.

[25] Op. cit., p. 70.

[26] *Movie*, no 5, 1962, p. 17.

[27] 'Dora and the Magic Lantern' in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, no 287.

[28] T. Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose*, Cornell Univ. Press, 1977, pp. 85–86.

[29] Ibid., pp. 86–87.

[30] Octave Mannoni, 'L'Illusion Comique ou le Théâtre du point de vue de l'Imaginaire' in *Clefs pour l'Imaginaire*, Le Seuil, Paris, 1969, esp. pp. 164–169.

[31] For a detailed discussion of *To Be or Not To Be* in terms of shifts in layers of artifice and conventions, see Sheila Whitaker's analysis in *Framework*, no 5, 1976/77.

[32] See Jean Louis Comolli's essay 'Historical Fiction – A Body Too Much' in *Screen*, Vol 19, no 2, 1978.

[33] R. Barthes, *S/Z*, Jonathan Cape Ltd, London 1975.

[34] Peter Wollen, 'Hitchcock's Vision' in *Cinema*, no 3.

[35] For a discussion of the role of chiaroscuro in the thriller, highlighting some of the points at issue here, see Paul Willemen's 'Notes Towards the Construction of Readings of Tourneur' in *Jacques Tourneur*, edited by Paul Willemen and Claire Johnston, Edinburgh Film Festival, 1975, esp. pp. 23–26.

[36] J. Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Hogarth Press, 1977, pp. 61–63.

[37] See for instance Karl Abraham's essay on scopophilia in his *Selected Papers*, Hogarth Press, 1978.

[38] For a discussion of 'trucage' and of the instances of fetishistic belief that those forms entail, see Christian Metz, 'Trucage et Cinéma' in *Essais sur la signification au cinéma*, Vol 11, Paris 1972. A (poor) translation of this essay appeared in *Critical Enquiry*, Vol 2, no 4, 1977.